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Fishery Leaflet 62

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PRESERVING THE ANGLER'S CATCH

Prepared in the Division of Fish Culture

During the warm summer months, fishermen are confronted with the problem of preserving their catch in good condition until they reach home or arrive at a place where refrigeration is available. By following a few simple rules, fish can be kept in good condition without ice for a period of approximately ten days.

TIPS ON KEEPING FISH ALIVE

Care should be taken that the fish are not injured when removing the hook. Hold the mouth open by grasping the lower jaw with the thumb and forefinger. Take hold of the hook with the other hand stretching the hole slightly, if necessary, to remove the barb. If the hook can not be removed readily or is embedded in the throat, its release may be facilitated by the use of a small stick with a notch cut in one end. Fishermen's knives have a special blade, known as a disgorger, designed for dislodging the hook and shielding its barb during withdrawal. When returning undersized fish to the water, always handle them with wet hands.

Some fishermen use a stringer for holding live fish. Others prefer a net with a drawstring or a loosely woven sack. Some fishing boats have a compartment supplied with fresh water for holding fish. The wire-hook stringer with a separate hook for each fish has proven very practical. The wire hook is run through the thin membrane back of the bony part of the lower jaw and through the upper lip. This permits the fish to close and open its mouth which is necessary for normal breathing. The stringer should never be run through the gills as this makes it more difficult for the fish to breathe and may cause death by suffocation; or the tender blood vessels of the gills may be injured, causing death by bleeding. Properly built boat compartments generally keep fish in good condition if not crowded. It usually is necessary to move the boat frequently to keep fresh water in the compartment. When a net or loosely woven sack is used the fish are placed in the container which is carried in the water alongside the boat. Fish properly strung or in a net or sack may be towed behind a slow moving boat. If the boat must travel fast the fish should be taken from the water. If fish have been injured or cannot be kept alive they should be killed immediately with a sharp blow on the head.

TEMPORARY PRESERVATION OF FISH

Fish should be bled as soon as killed. This is accomplished by removing the gills. It is desirable to dress the fish immediately thereafter. With trout and small panfish, the body cavity should be split down the belly to the vent for removal of the viscera. Fish with thick bodies and the

larger species, such as bass and pike, may be opened by cutting along the backbone and through the ribs into the body cavity. This will reduce the thickness of the flesh and permit better penetration of the salt. The entrails and gills are removed and the body cavity scraped clean of all traces of blood and internal organs. Do not wash the fish unless pure spring, well, or tap water is available. Lake and stream waters often contain large numbers of bacteria. Washing in such water may cause spoilage more quickly than if the fish were not dressed. After the fish is dressed, salt is rubbed into the flesh and dusted over the skin side in the proportion of one tablespoonful to three-fourths pound of fish. The fish are wrapped individually in fresh clean leaves or in several thicknesses of paper and stored in the coolest place available. A moisture proof container will keep them from coming in contact with soil or water containing harmful bacteria. If a cool spring box or well house is not available, the fish may be buried loosely in cool earth. Another method of keeping fish cool, is to place them in a basket or box covered with several thicknesses of burlap or other absorbent material. This covering is kept moist and the temperature is reduced by the cooling effect of evaporation. Fish salted and stored by this method will keep for about 24 hours. If they have been properly dressed they are ready for cooking when thoroughly rinsed.

If fish are to be kept longer than 24 hours, they should be dressed so that no piece is more than an inch in thickness. Each piece should be rolled in salt and packed with as much salt as will cling to it. The fish are wrapped and stored the same as in the 24-hour method except that not more than a pound of meat should be wrapped in a single package. The important point in preserving fish for more than 24 hours is to wrap them in plenty of salt. Fish preserved in this way should keep about ten days. They must be freshened for about four hours in two or more changes of fresh water before they are ready for cooking.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Jarvis, Norman D. 1943. Home preservation of fishery products: salting, smoking, and other methods of curing fish at home. Fishery Leaflet 18. Mimeographed, 26 pp. (Obtainable from the Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, Chicago 54, Ill.)

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